

# The Commercial Package

**T**HE most valuable contribution of the experienced supervisor is his ability to isolate the pivotal problem to be attacked in pursuit of a successful curriculum change.

## The Pivotal Problem

So what is the most important problem in this affluent age of comprehensive instructional packages? Simple. The pivotal problem is to arrive at a reasonable match between the purposes of the creators of the commercial package and the purposes of the local practitioners.

If the change agent fails in helping to bring about this match, the probability of achieving an enduring, successful instructional improvement drops quickly toward zero. This is especially true after the change agent withdraws the pump-priming, cheer-leading support attendant upon the early phases of the project.

Purpose-matching may strike many readers as a very conservative, no-change vicious cycle. Nevertheless, you can move a program only as far and as fast as you can move the practitioners in charge of it. The continuing task, therefore, is to engage staff in any and all activities which will upgrade their purposes—to which you can then hitch an upgraded program.

As the song goes: "Is that all there is?" Obviously not. Each package, like Pandora's

box, contains an insistent set of many other more visible problems. In passing, allow me to mention three such problems before returning to a more extensive treatment of what I have called the pivotal problem.

First, supervisors, principals, and teachers often become very preoccupied with the logistics of managing the complex inventory of new equipment and materials needed for innovative programs. This particular struggle usually extends from initial sampling and testing up through ordering, implementing, and replacement.

Second, these same staff members frequently begin with an inflated concern for the sociological problem of becoming comfortable and effective in the new roles they must perform for the successful operation of these instructional packages. And finally, tight budgets have a way of forcing all of us to acknowledge the economic problem raised by having to earmark a disproportionate amount of scarce funds for these few prized areas of the curriculum at the expense of less support to equally important other subjects.

## Warning

It is very easy to concentrate too much attention too early on the above distractions. If we do, we do so at the cost of giving too little attention too late to the most important problem, that of a possible mismatch (in-

# and the Local Supervisor

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compatibility) of purposes. For it is this condition, I believe, that ultimately causes a rejection of the new and an almost irreparable disarrangement of the old.

## Importance of Purpose-Matching

Five assumptions prompt me to assign first priority to purpose-matching when considering the adoption of commercially packaged curriculums:

1. I assume that the comprehensive package is designed as a total replacement of a sizable part of a local program and that it is a waste of time and a misuse of the potential value of a packaged curriculum to treat it only as an incidental supplement to existing programs.

2. A curriculum package is built in terms of a desired set of outcomes and consists of student objectives, subject matter, student activities, teaching strategies, and evaluation procedures designed to achieve those outcomes. Selected parts are ineffective when employed without the others.

3. A packaged curriculum can have general beneficial effect *only* when an insightful, creative teacher makes a final adaptation of the package to the peculiar needs of his students.

4. A teacher will not be sufficiently motivated to make the necessary adaptation of a

package unless he is in basic agreement with the purposes (rationale) of the package. Only with such a commitment will the teacher prize the student objectives, illuminate the content, stage the activities, apply the strategies, and evaluate performances in a manner which will assure optimum benefit to his particular students. There is no magic other than teacher magic that can generalize the benefits of a preconceived instructional package in meeting the varied needs of a large diversified student population.

5. A "replacement" package will be rejected by the recipient instructional system unless its goals are compatible with the operating rationale of the local staff. Not only is curriculum what the teacher does after he closes the classroom door; but also, instructional improvement is what the principal and his staff do after the supervisor leaves for the next school.

Therefore, if all of the above assumptions are true, it would appear that the crucial task in processing an effective adoption of curriculum packages is that of bringing about a match between the purposes of the commercial package and the purposes of the local practitioners.

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## The Supervisor's Role in Purpose-Matching

How can the supervisor help in the process of matching the purposes of the package with the purposes of the practitioners? Allow me to make some general suggestions about this role of the supervisor before concluding with two illustrations of how we have handled the selection of packages in our district.

As a leader, the supervisor must (a) analyze the special conditions surrounding each curriculum in his local district, (b) determine how these conditions compound the difficulty of purpose-matching, and (c) design an approach which will bring about

maximum matching under these existing conditions.

As a service person, the supervisor must help the staff with procedures which will make visible the intended purposes and classroom effectiveness of the available commercial packages.

Finally, as a supporting colleague, the supervisor must do whatever is necessary to encourage each teacher to make creative utilization of prepackaged curricula on the basis of their ongoing effect on his students.

**SET I CONDITIONS:** *In science, K-6, local purposes were clear; promising packages were available.*

In 1968 the conditions surrounding our elementary science curriculum were as follows: (a) the total staff had been involved in clarifying our purposes and in publishing a resource guide, (b) multiple textbooks and demonstration equipment were the major resources for teachers and students, (c) each school staff represented a different cluster of science aptitudes and backgrounds, and (d) promising commercial packages were becoming available offering different kinds of support to the varying competencies of our 10 elementary staffs.

Figure 1 is a flow chart showing the three-year (1968-71) approach we designed to enable each staff to make its own selection of packages for strengthening its implementation of our science program.

We might close our report of this case by noting that seven schools piloted assorted units from ESS, EIS, Minnemast, SRA, and Silver Burdett. Three schools piloted either SCIS or AAAS programs to determine antecedent conditions, problems of implementation, and obvious benefits of these materials as a total replacement of their former science programs.

In June 1970, with the help of the supervisor, schools will exchange evaluation reports of their pilot efforts. Quite possibly in the school year 1970-71 the total staff will reformulate the purposes and framework of its science program in light of the impact of these pilots. And so the cycle of purpose-matching goes on.

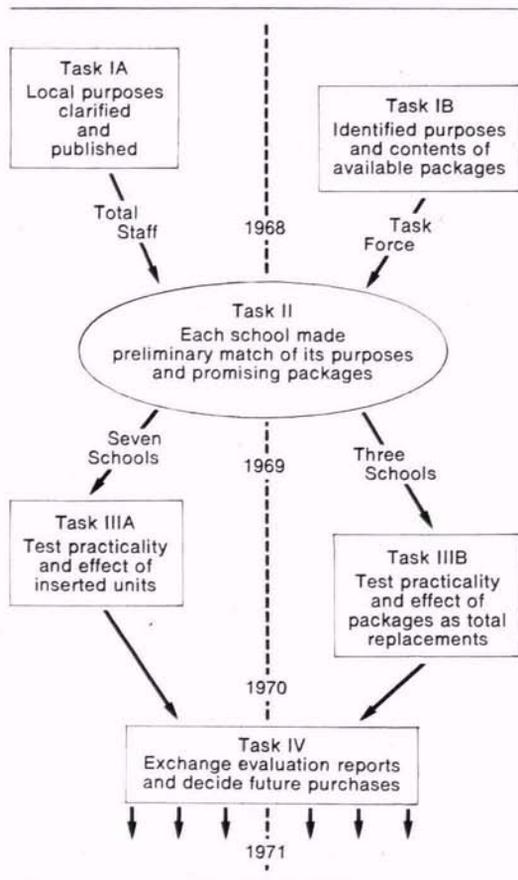


Figure 1. Flow Chart re: Science

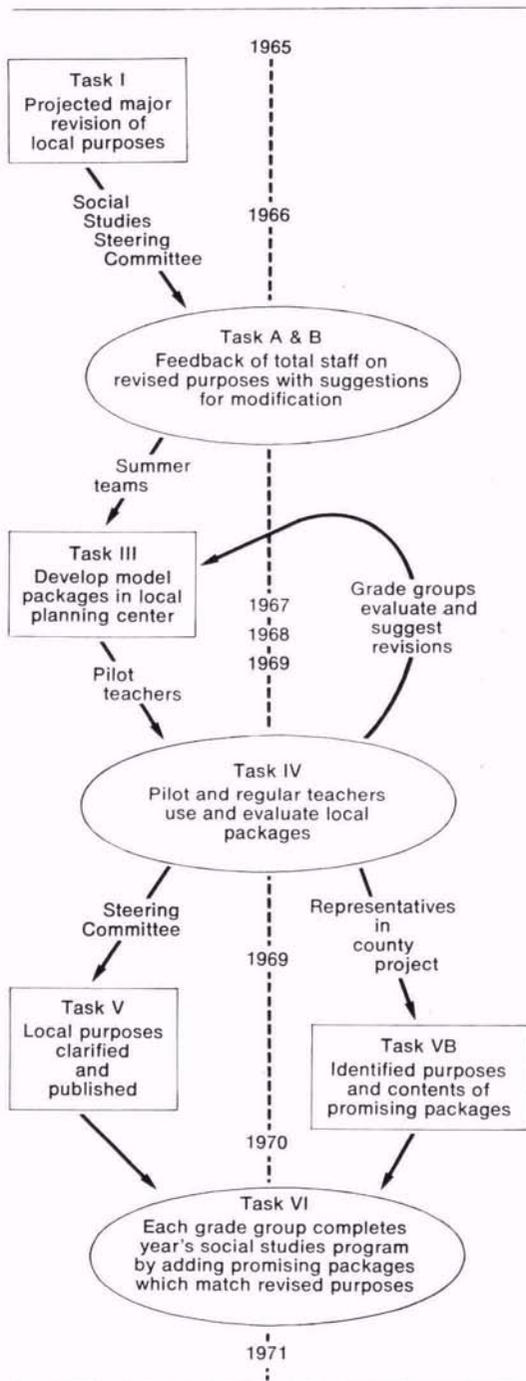


Figure 2. Flow Chart re: Social Studies

SET II CONDITIONS: *Social science, K-6, local purposes unclear; promising packages not available.*

In 1965 the conditions surrounding our elementary social science program were as follows: (a) units were basically factual studies with selection of topics for the most part based on a widening horizon sequence; (b) multiple textbooks, assorted AV materials, arts and crafts supplies were the major resources for teachers and students; (c) each teacher developed and executed units in terms of his interest and background with considerable sensitivity to the responses of students; and (d) just being experimented with in project centers were the conceptually-organized process approaches applying conflict analysis, role playing, gaming, and simulation to different social situations.

Figure 2 is a flow chart showing the five-year (1965-70) effort our district has sustained to enable staff to upgrade its purposes in social studies and to implement new types of packages produced locally and elsewhere.

The flow chart very feebly conveys the creative thought and emotional power expended in this project. The weekly head-knocking, philosophical sessions of the Steering Committee are long gone but well remembered. So, too, are the general staff workshops in which the Steering Committee took on all comers with an explication of its projected social process theory and conceptual framework. The loops through Tasks III and IV produced 12 comprehensive resource units, including three summers of production in the Ladue Planning Center and three years of testing in the classrooms.

Over this period of five years the staff, aided by the supervisor, has worked hard to upgrade its purposes in social studies. Given our thoroughly developed rationale and conceptual framework, we seem to be in an excellent position to evaluate, purchase, and modify, if necessary, newly available commercial packages. This semester we are trying two more from the St. Louis County project which we feel will considerably strengthen the implementation of our new social studies curriculum, grades K-6. □

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